

Eldridge, Iowa
November 8, 1956

Miss Mildred Pike, Librarian
Public Library
Sioux City, Iowa

Dear Miss Pike,

Well, she came, she saw, but I won't go so far as to say she conquered! Not that there was any show of not accepting the propositions, but there was some good discussion - all of which (including her original presentation) I have on tape. There were some of our board members and some of the Davenport board members who were able to attend the meeting, so since we have a tape recorder, I asked her if she'd mind our taping the entire meeting. I left it at the Davenport library last night however, so what I'll say now is strictly from memory and interpretation.

As I expected, after our conversation in Des Moines when I told her of my disapproval of the contract system, she did not dwell on the operation of plan 2 - in fact she didn't even mention the word until I practically forced her to in the question period. At that point, then, she explained that the federated plan meant that all these poor libraries in an area would contract with a larger library in the area for books, service, and professional assistance - that contract money to be paid out of the federal and state supplementary funds during the demonstration period, and the state funds thereafter, with the tax levy vote on by the rural people going into a contract with the State Traveling Library which would in turn send it back into the area . . . Why, honestly, if I hadn't been sitting there listening to it - and if I didn't have the proof of it on the tape I wouldn't believe that anything so inefficient to the point of being silly could be thought of - much less talked about - by any intelligent, experienced librarian. And she is both. Which brings me to pondering the question, "what is intelligent

As for the roll of the large library, in this area, region F, I believe it is, Cedar Rapids has been asked to serve as the central library or regional library for the area, giving space, service, books to the degree that each is needed, in return for which the library will be compensated with federal and state money. She has met with Clinton, but I gather she intends that it shall be a sub-regional, as will Scott County Library, sending out bookmobile service to the surrounding counties. ~~Scott~~ The Davenport library was asked to give reference service - through inter-library loan, for which it will be paid by federal and state funds. We'll be paid with that money, too, for extending our service into the surrounding counties.

Oh, honestly, Miss Pike, when I actually explain it myself, it sounds sillier than it did last night. I really think she's heading in the right direction, but why knock oneself out doing it the hard way!?

The catch in the 1st plan (which, because of my protest, in private, to the 2nd was the one she put forth for us last night) in the rest of the state is the same old one, the local boards of those poverty stricken libraries are loathe to give up

although, I'm sure they'd deny my first charge vehemently). The situation is, to me, at least, analogous to the school reorganization problem in one respect - the boards are not thinking first of the good of the child and his education - in the library the boards are not thinking first of the good of their public. They refuse to admit that their publics are not getting good service. This objection to giving up their own little business is what she's met up and down the land, and, so far as I've been able to get from her, is her chief (I was going to say sole, but perhaps she has some others that I've missed somewhere) reason for proposing the 2nd plan, that of contracts. So what happened after our meeting last night is particularly pleasing to my soul! Several of my board members were asking her just how a county-district (as she calls a regional) library would be administered, say in our case if Cedar, Muscatine, and Linton counties should vote to join us in such a regional library. I could just see the glint in her eye at me and see the wheels going merrily to work "Aha, young lady, here's where you get it, too" as she said very carefully and pointedly "It would mean that there would be one board from this whole area - each county having representation - and some of you would have to get off the board". It was just as though you'd lifted a great big weight off their shoulders, and they'd been primed for it beforehand - with one motion each of them turned and laughed and started walking away saying "Good, I'll gladly get off!" And they meant it! They're all up above their ears in public spirited jobs like the library board. The look on her face was a delight to see!

I would imagine that a somewhat similar plan might be offered in your area - although, she may ask you to be the regional center, as she has done with Cedar Rapids and Council Bluffs - neither of which, I gather, has bought it up to this point. I shouldn't speculate, for, so help me, I think she improvises as she goes along. No one - but no one - could have what she proposed last night on paper and have looked at it twice and made it public!

Miss Pike, I'm pouring my mind out to you in this manner because I know you're the soul of discretion. You're welcome to do with whatever is here what you wish. I am perturbed, though and if you can offer any suggestions that might help me, I'll appreciate it. I'm not bothered about my own area. I cannot, in conscience, go along with contracts - and I'm reasonably sure my own board will have nothing to do with them, although we have not discussed the proposition among ourselves. I decided after my conversation with Miss Grafton, and I told 2 of my board members so, that I would prefer not to tell the board anything - let them come into it as cold as all other boards. I was not going to give her any cause (founded, that is) for saying later that I'd prejudiced my board against her plan. I didn't say that to my board members, I merely said I'd prefer, if they didn't mind, to have them get it cold from Miss Grafton, I might misinterpret something in telling them. What bothers me (as I started to say at the beginning of this paragraph) is that can I let this thing go on and on without voicing protest outside my own area. If I were the only one who felt this way about contracts, I wouldn't be bothered - I'd soon change my way of thinking (I hope); but there are people in this business who know a lot more than I do about it who feel the same way!

I sincerely believe that to have library service developed all over Iowa by the contract system as these proposals would do it would be highly inefficient and extravagant. We'd be perpetuating the poverty stricken library - and doing it with state tax money.